Thousands rally in support of Yemen's separatist group

ADEN: Thousands of people took to the streets of Aden in southern Yemen on Saturday in support of the country's main separatist group, the Southern Transitional Council, which denied it was planning to disband.

Some held up photos of STC leader Aidarous al-Zubaidi, who has fled the country, while others chanted "southerner, raise your voice, independence or death", a witness said.

People took to the streets despite Saudi-backed groups urging them on Friday not to do so. The STC seized parts of southern and eastern Yemen in December in advances that heightened tensions with Saudi Arabia.

"We have taken to the streets again... No one can silence us... Not Saudi Arabia, nor any other party or country," one man who took to the streets said.

Another said: "This large public gathering is a powerful message and a popular referendum in the south for the Southern Transitional Council." The armed forces of the rival, Saudi-backed government said it would "strike firmly and decisively against anyone who seeks to tamper with security or disrupt public order," without making any reference to the protests.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE used to work together in a coalition battling Houthis in Yemen's civil war, but the STC advances exposed their rivalry, bringing into focus big differences on a wide range of issues across the Middle East ranging from geopolitics to oil output.

Saudi-backed fighters have largely retaken the areas of southern and eastern Yemen that the STC seized, and an STC delegation has travelled to the Saudi capital Riyadh for talks.

But STC leader al-Zubaidi skipped the planned meetings and fled Yemen on Wednesday. In an announcement broadcast on Saudi state media on Friday, one of the group's members said the STC had decided to disband. But in a statement issued on Saturday, the STC said it had held an "extraordinary meeting" following the announcement in Riyadh and declared it "null and void", saying it had been made "under coercion and pressure".

The group also said its members in Riyadh had been detained and were being "forced to issue statements".

The STC reiterated calls for mass protests in southern cities on Saturday, warning against any attempts that target the group's "peaceful activities".—Reuters

OIC adopts resolutions

Continued from Page 1

independent state as a "dangerous precedent that constituted a flagrant violation of international law and a direct threat to regional security and stability".

The secretary general explained that the current meeting was a follow-up to an extraordinary session of the executive committee with open membership at the level of permanent representatives, held at the headquarters of the organisation's general secretariat on Jan 1.

"It clearly reflects the extent of shared concern about these dangerous developments.

It also reflects the collective awareness of member states of the need to adopt a unified, clear, and firm Islamic position that supports the Federal Republic of Somalia, its territorial integrity and sovereignty, based on the principles of the OIC Charter, the provisions of international law, and relevant United Nations resolutions," he noted.

Palestine situation

In his address, the secretary general also discussed the situation in Palestine, stressing the need to compel Israel, the occupying power, to move to the second phase of the ceasefire agreement.

He called for a comprehensive and permanent cessation of Israeli aggression, a complete withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the prevention of the displacement of the Palestinian people and the facilitation of the return of displaced persons to their homes.

The meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers was preceded by a preparatory session at the level of senior officials.

New chancery building

Earlier in the day, Mr Dar inaugurated the new chancery building of the Consulate General of Pakistan in Jeddah at a ceremony, state-run *APP* reported.

The ceremony was attended by Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ahmad Farooq, Saudi dignitaries, Consul General of Pakistan in Jeddah Syed Mustafa Rabbani, prominent members of the Pakistani community, and officials of the Pakistan Consulate in Jeddah.

During the inauguration ceremony, the Pakistani flag was hoisted on the premises of the new chancery building, followed by a tree plantation in the chancery lawn, ribbon-cutting, unveiling of the plaque, and the offering of prayers for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

A brief video report highlighting the features of the project was also displayed.

BUSES carrying fighters of the anti-government Kurdish forces who surrendered, leave Aleppo's Sheikh Maksoud neighbourhood.—Reuters

Some Kurdish fighters leave Aleppo, others still holed up

Syria's army says it will conduct a ground operation to clear the city of 'hardened fighters'

ALEPPO: Several Kurdish fighters left Syria's second city on Saturday and the army said it was still working to clear a remaining group of hardened fighters after a ceasefire failed to end days of deadly clashes.

The violence in Aleppo has deepened one of the main faultlines in Syria, where President Ahmed al-Sharaa's promise to unify the country under one leadership after 14 years of war has faced resistance from Kurdish forces wary of his Islamist-led government.

The United States and other world powers welcomed a ceasefire earlier in the week, but Kurdish forces refused to leave the last stronghold of Sheikh Maksoud under the deal. Syria's army said it would conduct a ground operation to clear them and combed through the neighbourhood on Saturday.

Reporters then saw dozens of men, women and children streaming out of the neighbourhood on foot. Syrian troops put them onto buses and said they would be taken to displacement shelters. More than 140,000 people have already been displaced by the fighting this week.

Syrian security officials at the scene identified them as members of the Kurdish internal security forces, known as the Asayish, and said they had surrendered. The Asayish later denied any of those who left Aleppo were fighters, saying they were all civilians that had been forcibly displaced.

Accusations over violation

US envoy Tom Barrack said on Saturday he had met Sharaa in Damascus, and urged all parties to "exercise maximum restraint, immediately cease hostilities, and return to dialogue." He said US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's team was ready to mediate.

Barrack earlier said a consolidated ceasefire would see the "peaceful withdrawal of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from Aleppo," referring to the main Kurdish force.

Three Syrian security sources said a batch of Kurdish fighters including some commanders and their families were secretly ferried out of Aleppo overnight to the country's northeast. Ilham Ahmad, who heads the Kurdish administration's foreign relations department, had overnight welcomed a deal to safely redeploy fighters from Sheikh Maksoud to eastern Syria. She was the only Kurdish official to acknowledge their exit from Aleppo as part of the deal, and there was no public announcement later of a completed withdrawal.

Turkish security sources hinted at a possible divide within Kurdish factions, saying Ankara had reached out to some senior Kurdish officials and noted a willingness to compromise, naming Ahmad and SDF commander Mazloum Abdi specifically. But the Turkish sources said other fighters opted to hold out and fight.

Kurdish fighters were still holed up in a hospital in Sheikh Maksoud on Saturday, security sources said. The SDF said it was waging street battles against government forces, accusing them of indiscriminately bombing civilian infrastructure, including the hospital, where civilians were taking cover.

They said the attacks were backed by Turkish drones. A Turkish security source denied they were used, and said the operation was "largely completed, there was no need" for Turkish backing.

The Syrian army has denied conducting indiscriminate attacks and accused the SDF of attacking Aleppo's town hall with a drone. The SDF denied the claim.

The takeover of Sheikh Maksoud by the army would oust Kurdish forces from pockets of Aleppo they have held since Syria's war began in 2011. Kurdish forces still run a semi-autonomous zone in large parts of Syria's northeast.

They have resisted efforts to integrate into Syria's new government, made up of former rebels who ousted longtime leader Bashar al-Assad in December 2024. With negotiations on their merging stalled, fighting erupted in Aleppo on Tuesday, killing at least nine civilians.

The clashes are the latest bout of sectarian violence in Syria. In 2025, more than 1,000 people from the Alawite minority were killed by government-linked forces and hundreds from the Druze minority were killed in the southern province of Sweida, including in execution-style killings.

The fighting in Aleppo has closed a key highway to Turkiye and factories in its industrial zone. Syria's General Authority of Civil Aviation said on Saturday Aleppo's international airport would remain closed until further notice.—Reuters

Nobel Institute nixes Machado's idea of transferring her award to Trump

PALM BEACH: The Norwegian Nobel Institute said on Friday the Nobel Peace Prize cannot be transferred, shared, or revoked, following remarks by Venezuelan opposition leader Mara Corina Machado suggesting she might give her award to US President Donald Trump.

In a statement, the institute said the decision to award a Nobel Prize is final and permanent, citing the statutes of the Nobel Foundation, which do not allow appeals. The organisation also noted that committees awarding the prizes do not comment on the actions or statements of laureates after receiving awards.

Once a Nobel Prize is announced, it cannot be revoked, shared or transferred to others, the Norwegian Nobel Committee and the Nobel Institute said. The decision is final and stands for all time.

On Monday, Machado, speaking on *Fox News*, said that presenting the prize to Trump would be an "act of gratitude" from the Venezuelan people for the removal of Nicols Maduro.

Did you at any point offer to give him the Nobel

Peace Prize? Hannity asked. Did that actually happen? She replied: "Well, it hasn't happened yet."

Trump, who has long expressed interest in winning the prize and has at times linked it to diplomatic achievements, said he would be honoured to accept the prize if offered by Machado during a planned meeting in Washington next week.

Machado, a former National Assembly member, was barred from running in Venezuela's 2024 general election by authorities aligned with Maduro.—Reuters

Six shot dead in Mississippi

JACKSON: Six people were fatally shot on Friday night in the US state of Mississippi and the suspect was in custody, according to local news outlets and law enforcement.

The deaths occurred at three different shooting locales in Clay County, according to a television channel.

The suspect is in custody "and no longer poses a threat to our community", the Clay County sheriff posted on social media.

"I ask that you remember our victims and their families in your prayers," the sheriff wrote on *Facebook*.

Located in northeastern Mississippi, Clay County has a population of 20,000.—Reuters

Listen to abuse victims, Pope tells cardinals

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV stressed the importance of listening to victims of clerical sex abuse during a meeting with cardinals from around the world this week, according to comments released on Saturday.

In a speech concluding the two-day, closed-door consistory, the US pope said the abuse of children and vulnerable adults by priests was still a "wound" in the Catholic Church.

"Listening is profoundly important," Leo said, according to a Vatican transcript, adding: "We cannot close our eyes, nor our hearts." He noted that abuse was not a specific topic for discussion during the consistory, his first since taking over as head of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics in May following the death of Pope Francis.

But he said he wanted to raise it in his closing remarks, saying the scourge was "a problem that still today is truly a wound in the life of the Church in many places".

"I would like to say, and encourage you to share this with the bishops: many times the pain of the victims has been worsened by the fact that they were not welcomed and listened to," he said. "The abuse itself causes a deep wound that can last a lifetime.

"But many times the scandal in the Church is because the door has been closed and the victims have not been welcomed." He added: "A victim recently told me that the most painful thing for her was that no bishop wanted to listen to her."—AFP

Indonesia suspends Grok AI over pornographic content

JAKARTA: Indonesia suspended Elon Musk's AI chatbot Grok on Saturday over concerns about AI-generated pornographic content, the country's communication and digital affairs minister said.

Grok has faced a global backlash after it emerged that its image creation feature allowed users to sexualise pictures of women and children using simple text prompts.

Indonesia is the first country to deny all access to the tool, which has been restricted to paying subscribers elsewhere following the backlash.

"In order to protect women, children, and the public from the risks of fake pornographic content generated using the artificial intelligence technology, the government... has temporarily blocked access to the Grok application," Communication and Digital Affairs Minister Meutya Hafid said.

"The government views non-consensual deepfake practices as a serious violation of human rights, dignity, and the security of citizens in the digital space."—AFP

'State of disaster' declared in Australian region as bushfires rage

PM warns of extreme and dangerous weather

SYDNEY: Australian authorities declared a state of disaster on Saturday after bushfires destroyed houses and razed vast belts of forest in the country's southeast.

Temperatures soared past 40C as a heatwave blanketed the state of Victoria this week, with hot winds fanning some of the most dangerous fire weather since the "Black Summer" bushfires of 2019-2020.

One of the most destructive bushfires ripped through almost 150,000 hectares (370,000 acres) near Longwood, a region cloaked in native forests.

State premier Jacinta Allan on Saturday declared a state of disaster, giving fire crews emergency powers to force evacuations. "It's all about one thing: protecting Victorian lives," she said.

"And it sends one clear message: if you have been told to leave, go." Three people missing inside one of the state's most dangerous fire grounds had been found, Allan said.

Emergency Management Commissioner Tim Wiebusch said at least 130 structures had been destroyed across the state, a figure that includes houses, sheds and other buildings.

"We've seen significant livestock, cropping land and vineyards that have also been impacted or destroyed," he told reporters. Wiebusch said 10 major fires were still burning despite conditions easing.

"Importantly, many of these major fires will continue to burn for days, if not weeks.

"We are expecting more fires today as a result of lightning that occurred throughout yesterday afternoon and overnight." The worst blazes have largely been confined to sparsely populated rural areas where towns might number a few hundred people.

Photos taken this week showed the night sky glowing orange as the fire near Longwood ripped through bushland.

PM's warning

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Saturday the nation faced "extreme and dangerous" weather as a bushfire crisis gripped Victoria state, razing homes and burning vast swathes of bushland.

Authorities have said the fires, which took hold amid a heatwave and have been fanned by strong winds, are the worst to hit the state since the Black Summer blazes of 2019-2020 that destroyed an area the size of Turkiye and killed 33 people.—Agencies

A MAN inspects damage to his property amid bushfires in Harcourt, Victoria.—Reuters

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